

Introduction

Start where you are, but don't stay there.

—AFRICAN SAYING

THERE ARE MOMENTS in our lives that help define and shape them, times and experiences that we never forget. I recall such a moment during my first semester of doctoral studies at The Ohio State University. I was nervous. I wondered if I “belonged” in graduate school. I worried that I would not succeed. And then it happened. Associate Dean Charles Hancock began his comments to a group of us, all first-semester doctoral students, with the African saying above: “*Start where you are, but don't stay there,*” he stated. I was astonished—simply stunned. I cannot share much with readers about what else occurred or was said during that meeting. All I can recall is that moment when he uttered those words. I knew then—right in that moment—that Dean Hancock had shared some wisdom with us that would forever change how I thought about my personal and professional life. He had encouraged us to embrace a lifelong cognitive, social, and emotional journey that would allow us to do our best work, realizing that we are never really finished learning and contributing to education and society. I immediately started to transfer and apply what he had shared to a range of experiences and emotions I was working through. He had spoken directly to me on that day as I wrestled with my decision to leave my

comfortable teaching position in Columbia, South Carolina, and move to Columbus, Ohio, for doctoral study.

As I have thought about the many roles I have assumed and continue to assume in education, such as student, former high school teacher, teacher, teacher educator, social scientist, and researcher, I have pondered how to improve and move forward in these various aspects of my professional life. Moreover, as a father of two daughters, watching them grow and develop, I find something particularly educative about embracing life as a never-ending journey. In a similar way, I am hopeful that readers of this book—teachers, administrators, principals, school counselors, school psychologists, staff, graduate students, teacher educators, and researchers from within and outside of education—will critique, embrace, and learn from the ideas presented here, with the ultimate goal of improving their work and progressing in their own journey. The work of preparing teachers, for me, is a deeply personal endeavor, one that requires us to engage inwardly as we work to support others. The work of teaching is deeply political, and rather than criticizing the practices of others for the sake of an intellectual exercise, my hope is that readers find transferable features that can improve practices with students.

Each of us, from those early in our careers to those more seasoned, has room to grow and to improve. Thus, I invite readers to think about the lessons and the moments captured in this book as sites from which to learn and to grow. My goal in this book is not to beat up on teachers. As a former public school teacher, I believe that teachers are sometimes blamed for situations and issues far beyond their control. However, I do believe that most teachers can and must put forth more energy and effort to become more effective in the classroom with their students. Thus, educators, particularly White teachers, must critically examine their own biases, privileges, assumptions, worldviews, inconsistencies, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and other forms of oppression on their journey to teach better and to teach more effectively. I encourage readers to strive to improve the practices that are in their control and that have a real bearing on students' opportunities to learn.

I care deeply about what happens to students, all students, in schools. I have been perplexed and baffled for many years, though, about why some students—students of color (Black and Brown students), students whose first language is not English, Muslim students, immigrant students, students with ability differences, LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans*, queer/questioning, intersex, agender/asexual) students, and students who live below the poverty line—too often struggle to succeed in schools. To be sure, in teacher education, we must better support teachers in building the essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, mind-sets, and practices they need to embark upon their teaching journeys and, hopefully, to teach all students effectively.

Among the many questions I have pondered over the years are: How do teachers design learning environments that build on the many talents and strengths that preK–12 students bring into the classroom? What is essential for teachers and students to build the kinds of relationships that allow both teachers and students the space to “not stay there” as everyone improves academically, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and physically? How do (and should) we build learning ecologies that teach from, to, and through diversity in a classroom? Throughout my work with teachers and schools, I have focused my attention on inputs—tools, strategies, and mechanisms to support student learning—over outputs that too often focus narrowly on test scores. As emphasis on standardized testing intensifies, it is not difficult to ponder whether we are focusing on too much testing and not enough teaching.

TOO MUCH TESTING, NOT ENOUGH TEACHING

Educational researcher and teacher educator Gloria Ladson-Billings has concluded that in US society there is not so much an achievement gap as an “education debt” that the educational system owes to the many students it has poorly served.¹ Ladson-Billings challenged educational researchers and the field of education to question and rethink our overemphasis on achievement gap discourse and related practices. Her deep analyses

provided a solid foundation for the field to reimagine educational research beyond achievement gaps and test scores. Ladson-Billings's critique helped shape my own view on the overreliance and overfocus on achievement gaps in education. Moreover, educational researcher and teacher educator Jacqueline Irvine suggests that a perceived achievement gap is the result of other gaps that seduce people into believing that an achievement gap actually exists.² Rather than focus on a perceived achievement gap, Irvine recommends that we shift our attention to closing the other gaps that exist in education; these include "the teacher quality gap; the teacher training gap; the challenging curriculum gap; the school funding gap; the digital divide gap; the wealth and income gap; the employment opportunity gap; the affordable housing gap; the health care gap; the nutrition gap; the school integration gap; and the quality childcare gap."³

From an ecological perspective, many teachers design the learning milieu believing that their students of color are underachievers, poorly prepared, and lagging behind their White classmates. Such a position can lead teachers into mind-sets and practices that do not recognize the strengths and expertise (even genius) among entire groups of students. While the achievement gap discourse in education usually focuses on students' scores on standardized tests, it also concerns student graduation rates, patterns in gifted and advanced placement and talent programs, and other measurable outcomes that allow comparisons between White students and other racial groups of students. Standardization, in many ways, is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments and are afforded equality of opportunity. In this way, standardization is the opposite of diversity. While on the one hand it is necessary to hold educators accountable for providing optimal learning opportunities for students, on the other hand, our instructional practices need to be tailored for students in ways that honor them as diverse human beings by building their intellectual, social, psychological, and emotional muscles to succeed academically.

My analyses of empirical research and policy reports will not allow me to accept a "eugenics" explanation for an "achievement gap"—that there is

a “biological basis for the superiority of Whites.”⁴ Put simply, White people *are not, are not, are not* biologically, genetically, or innately superior to other groups in terms of intelligence or any other indicators. If educators agree with this reality—that no group of people is intellectually superior to another—then they should be willing to delve into the complex social maze of rationales for what are perceived as achievement gaps. Even at a time in US and world history when formal sanctions of slavery and Jim Crow have long since ended, there are still deeply ingrained social factors that inhibit certain populations of students from reaching their full capacity to learn. The question is: why?

In this book, I argue that we need to refocus attention away from an achievement gap and toward an opportunity gap. I invite readers to engage in a *paradigm and mind-set shift*—to alter their thinking, ideologies, belief systems, and overall worldviews in terms of how we socially construct achievement and success. Consider four important, interrelated questions regarding this necessary mind shift: (1) To what extent is achievement synonymous with learning? (2) What does it mean to experience learning opportunities in one school community in comparison to another? (3) Who decides what it means to achieve and why? (4) How do (and should) we address the kind of learning that never shows up on achievement measures—including high-stakes tests?

Critical theorist Michael Apple stresses that those of us in education must continue to question what knowledge is, how it is constructed and validated, and who decides the worth, value, and meanings of knowledge and knowledge construction.⁵ I believe similar questions should be posed about achievement. As with knowledge, certain areas of achievement are privileged over others. In this sense, there are societal high and low cultural ways of looking at achievement and knowledge. For instance, in literacy, knowledge about traditional canonical texts from authors such as William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens is considered “high culture,” while African American literature written by authors such as Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin may be classified as “low culture” (from a White-dominated societal perspective).

Some sociologists would argue that it is ineffectual to spend extensive amounts of time comparing one group with another.⁶ I agree, and focusing on an achievement gap inherently forces us to compare culturally diverse students with White students without always understanding the reasons that undergird disparities and differences.

I will not spend pages comparing the opportunity gaps between White students and culturally diverse students. Rather, I invite readers to think about opportunity in a broader sense, as all students and teachers deserve to be engaged in opportunities that improve their lives. For instance, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds bring assets into the classroom that should be maximized. Students in predominantly White settings should have opportunities to engage in race- and diversity-related learning opportunities as well. However, this kind of learning, where students are actively involved with understanding issues of diversity in preK–12 schools, may never show up on a standardized test, although developing such knowledge and awareness is important.

I am asking readers of this book to rethink their conceptions of why many students of color do not fare well in a range of schools across US society, from urban to suburban to rural settings, and why we focus on the measures of success and achievement that we do. It is important to understand that I am not suggesting that educators should not be concerned about achievement gaps and test scores. I realize that educators operate in systems that require them to focus on these matters. I understand that we should work to prepare all students for success on these examinations because they operate in an educational system that is steeped in traditional, White, classed, gendered notions of achievement.

However, if we can cultivate lifelong learners—those who are inquisitive, who pose insightful questions and push beyond the obvious and the traditional, who are empathetic and committed to collective advancement—we have a better chance of student success. In short, in this book, I demonstrate the importance of educators' thinking very seriously and deliberately about the interrelated nature of diversity, opportunity, and

teaching in a range of different classroom spaces. As they build knowledge and practices, I am hopeful that their relational efficacy and instructional agility intensify.

RELATIONAL EFFICACY AND INSTRUCTIONAL AGILITY

Based on my many years of studying teachers' practices and talking with teachers about their work, I have found that it is difficult for teachers to teach their particular subject-matter area if they do not understand the diversity-opportunity nexus. As students become increasingly diverse, it is becoming more difficult to teach them and for teacher education programs, whether traditional or nontraditional, to prepare teachers. These diversity aspects include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, ability, socioeconomic background, and geography. These general, more traditional (yet still essential) categories are complicated by individual circumstances, such as whether students are supported and encouraged to complete homework, whether parents have the ability and skill to help children complete their homework, whether students live in two-family homes, whether adequate financial resources are available to families (e.g., could parents hire a tutor to assist their children with homework?), and whether there is social, emotional, and psychological safety and support for students. While the factors just described focus on students' realities outside of school, the general features of diversity such as race, class, and gender are also exacerbated based on in-school realities, such as the number of years teachers have been teaching, their preparedness to work with a diverse cadre of learners, their knowledge of and ability to teach their content, the types of professional learning teachers experience, and the types of support, coaching, and mentoring educators receive. Moreover, students' experiences are also influenced by the types of school counselors available to them, technological and other resources available, discipline/punishment referral practices embedded in

a school, club and extracurricular opportunities available, and the training and availability of psychologists and social workers.

This book addresses two critical aspects of the diversity-opportunity nexus in the classroom: (1) focusing on diversity and opportunity to better understand social relationships between educators and students, and (2) focusing on diversity and opportunity to incorporate and infuse those dimensions into curriculum and instructional practices. The first emphasis is on what I call *relational efficacy*—on teachers' confidence in their ability to develop the knowledge, insights, understandings, mind-sets, skills, abilities, and ultimately practices necessary to connect with, care about, and empathize with students and co-create learning contexts where students feel safe, affirmed, whole, and loved. In other words, I attempt to demonstrate in this book that teaching and learning are not only about teaching a subject. Opportunity and diversity connections require teachers to build relational efficacy—particularly when students are placed on the margins of learning and are underserved in classrooms and schools.

Educators do tend to grasp that they need to understand themselves and how their own experiences shape who they are in relation to others. Similarly, educators seem to understand that they should design a learning environment that promotes respect and care between and among students. However, educators often struggle with how to co-develop social contexts where they are able to relate to their students and keep their students connected to the learning environment. Moreover, they can find it difficult to design and construct classroom settings where all their students feel safe to speak up and speak out, not only against oppressive, sexist, racist, or homophobic subject matter they are learning, but also against social structures—the sociology of the classroom—that can make them feel inferior or voiceless, or that is designed to control them (how they think and what they do). Teachers may wonder how to help students from different cultural backgrounds to feel that they possess valuable knowledge and skills that can and should contribute to classroom learning opportunities.

A second focus—how teachers build and enact *instructional agility*—is about adaptability of teachers' instructional practices and also essential

because research demonstrates that all students become disengaged, disinterested, and disconnected from lessons and learning opportunities when they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum and related opportunities to learn. Instructional agility ensures that educators consciously and deliberately co-construct learning environments that consistently and unwaveringly push normative ways of thinking about what gets taught (curriculum) and how (instruction). Instructional agility is about teachers' ability to be flexible and responsive to the students in front of them. Researchers and theoreticians agree that a race-centered,⁷ culture- and diversity-focused,⁸ and multicultural⁹ curriculum is essential for student academic and social success. So this book is about the social as well as the cognitive. It showcases the possibilities of the relational and the instructional. Indeed, all students need and deserve to encounter a curriculum that highlights and reflects the life experiences and contributions of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups—not just those of the White, male mainstream.

In addition, students need to have opportunities to critique curriculum practices and instructional practices—even when teachers practice instructional agility. Students should be able to provide counterpositions to what they are reading, solving, thinking about, and addressing across subject matter, grade, and age. The very *nature* of content and *how* it is actually incorporated into learning opportunities are critical for students, especially those who are too often seen as consumers, not contributors, of knowledge construction.¹⁰ Multicultural educator Geneva Gay stresses that students often feel “insulted, embarrassed, ashamed, and angered when reading and hearing negative portrayals of their ethnic groups or not hearing anything at all.”¹¹ Thus, it is not enough to incorporate the historical, political, and social experiences, events, and challenges of various ethnic groups into curriculum practices. Educators must recognize that the essence of that curricular content (what is actually included, how, and why) is very important as students come to understand themselves and others in a pluralistic and ever-changing society. Students need to see themselves and their cultural group, viewpoint, ways of being, origins of existence, and other such factors from positions of strength and

tenacity, not servitude or submission. These two necessities, relational efficacy and instructional agility, are essential elements of addressing diversity and opportunity as they are considered throughout this book. Indeed, relational efficacy requires educators to build necessary confidence in cultivating and sustaining relationships. Instructional agility encourages educators to coconstruct learning opportunities in a fluid, dynamic way that honors the diversity among all students.

I have intentionally parsed race from diversity in some discussions throughout this book, although I realize that race is a dimension of diversity. I have done this because too many educators gloss over race and racism as important areas of consideration in broader diversity discourses, for a variety of reasons: (1) they are uncomfortable talking about them, (2) they find race and racism irrelevant to teaching and learning, (3) race and racism are sometimes considered taboo subjects due to their horrific history in US society, (4) discussions of race and racism are deeply political and emotionally charged, (5) race is misunderstood by so many, and can be divisive both within and outside of education, and (6) some see race and racism as marginal to studying and advancing knowledge in a particular domain of teaching and learning. A much more nuanced and elaborate discussion of these and related issues will be explored in chapter 1, where I discuss an Opportunity Gap Framework, and in other parts of the text.

OPPORTUNITY GAPS

Opportunity gaps are input-related practices and policies that are process driven and can result in students' academic, cognitive, social, affective, emotional, behavioral, and psychological challenges. Opportunity gaps tend to result from educators' and policy makers' inability to deeply understand the mechanisms essential for all students to learn, develop, and improve over time. Opportunity gaps are exacerbated when educators and policy makers have a myopic view of excellence and success, seeing White performance as the gold standard to which all others should strive.

Moreover, opportunity gaps are intensified when educators and policy makers are unable or perhaps unwilling to question who decides what knowledge and knowing are and have a static view of both.

I believe that when we address opportunity gaps, achievement results improve. I am a product of opportunity. People in society, in institutions, and in education have given me many chances to demonstrate my capacity. Ultimately, it was up to me to embrace and to maximize those opportunities, but others first had to give me a chance to succeed within complex systems that were racist, classist, and patriarchal. Too many students in preK–12 institutions have not been provided ample opportunities to develop into successful students because our educational system has not been structurally designed to do so. Opportunity is at the core of success and failure in *society* as well as in *schools*.¹²

However, a dominant, oppressive, and repressive view is that the performances, experiences, and outcomes of White students are “the norm” by which others are compared, measured, assessed, and evaluated.¹³ Static and exclusively Eurocentric views of normality are problematic.¹⁴ In essence, it is difficult for many to embrace what multicultural educator and teacher educator Cynthia Dillard explains: people of color are not simply White people with colored or pigmented skin.¹⁵ Their normality is shaped by (among other qualities) their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage beliefs and values. So, who decides what is normal and acceptable? How can we broaden our mind-sets and our conceptions of difference so that our work in education benefits all students? Further, how do we co-create learning spaces where students feel safe and connected to the curriculum?

CURRICULUM PRACTICES

The curriculum can be defined as what students have the opportunity to learn. Curriculum practices are closely tied to instruction—they are the enactment of learning opportunities available to people. Of course, while students are exposed to learning opportunities inside the classroom,

learning also occurs in other spaces: in students' homes and communities, on their bus rides and walks to and from school, on the playground, and in the corridors of their schools. Although the evidence is clear that learning occurs in and across multiple and varied sites, teachers are mostly taught to consider a "formal," explicit curriculum of the classroom. Curriculum practices can be constructed in ways that (1) attempt to strip students of their identity, culture, and cultural practices (their language, the way they dress, their reading and music preferences, and so forth); (2) build competition as students work to out-test (masked through the language of achievement) their classmates and others; and (3) do not attempt to help students heal and work through difficult situations that result in hurt, pain, and disappointment (even when schools are the places that breed these emotions and feelings).

Curriculum theorist Elliot Eisner conceptualized three essential forms of the curriculum. First, the *explicit curriculum* concerns learning opportunities that are overtly taught and stated or printed in documents that are typically drawn from standards, policies, and related guidelines. Second, the *implicit curriculum* may be intended or unintended but is not stated or written down; it can also be considered the hidden curriculum.¹⁶ For instance, when students receive messages about gender stereotypes such as "hitting like a girl" or that boys are "stronger than girls," they are learning, but these learning opportunities are not explicit or written down, and the implicit messages may be intentional or unintentional. Third, the *null curriculum* refers to what students do not have the opportunity to learn. Learning opportunities that are not available for students are also forms of the curriculum. Students are learning something based on the absence of certain experiences, discourses, and overall learning opportunities. For example, if students are not taught to question or to critically examine power structures, they are learning something—that they are not intended to critique power structures or change them. In short, *what is absent or not included in the curriculum is actually present in what students are learning.*

CURRICULUM PRACTICES, RACE, AND THE NULL

After the terror attack by White supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the assassination of Heather Heyer, I learned that many students were left confused, frustrated, hurt, and uncertain about what they believed they knew and had come to believe about people and the United States of America (US). I found that too many educators went about their work just as they had in the past: not teaching the real history of the United States and not teaching the underlying realities of what Charlottesville meant for society writ large (locally and domestically). Most schools (from elementary to high) did not work to explicitly help students heal and think about social injustice. Educators taught the occurrences of Charlottesville and consequently their students' feelings of hurt through what can be described as a null curriculum. Yet one could argue that it is likely that these same educators will be disappointed and perhaps even surprised when the next Charlottesville occurs, and their students are involved. Thus, when we teach through the null, we can be complicit in the maintenance of the status quo and the consequences of White supremacy, hate, and patriarchy.

WE CAN AND MUST DO BETTER

Teachers work hard—their hearts tend to be in the right place. They want to be difference-makers in the lives of their students. But teachers need support in building the kinds of tools necessary for students to heal from the layers of abuse and punishment they have experienced. And perhaps most important, teachers need to experience emancipatory spaces that allow them to make professional judgments as they deeply learn about their students. The Charlottesville, Virginia, terror attack committed by a White supremacist who drove his car into a crowd serves as an excellent opportunity for school leaders and teachers across the United States and the world to reimagine the null curriculum and explicitly shepherd students into becoming social justice activists. Engaging these issues across the curriculum

(not just during an abbreviated time period, such as homeroom or a social studies classroom) sends a real message to students that we must create the kind of world we want to live in—one that fights against bigotry in all forms.

Systemic, institutional shifts are ideal to build the kind of citizenry that enables us to take forward steps toward equity and healing. To build organizational and institutional shifts, educators must remember the following:

- Individuals (such as policy makers, school leaders, educators, parents, and students) make systems; teachers must feel supported to teach in ways that honor all students and that disrupt, challenge, name, and call out the perpetuation of racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic thinking, mind-sets, practices, policies, and discourses.
- Administrators have to build a culture of love, anti-hate, and liberation and not expect teachers to engage in this work inside of their classroom without overt commitment and support from those in positions to make decisions on behalf of the broader citizenry. Focusing solely on individuals (such as teachers) to make real, long-term, systemic change is short-sighted and will not result in the systemic, institutional, and long-term shifts that are needed.

If Charlottesville, Virginia, is addressed once or perhaps over a few days in isolation and then curriculum practices shift back to learning sites as usual—spaces that teach fallacies of US history, fallacies that suggest that one group of people is inherently better than another, or that individuals merit their success based on their intellect, abilities, and hard work—I suspect we will continue to get nowhere fast. But if we allow Charlottesville, Virginia, to serve as a true anchor to reimagine the curriculum (and especially the null), we can move toward healing—healing that faces the reality of so many other issues that need addressing and that continue to keep particular groups of students feeling angry, hurt, frustrated, sad, and hopeless. If we reimagine what we teach and place social justice at the center of our work, we have an opportunity to help students think through issues of injustice and perhaps build tools to address and change them.

These are just a few examples of how curriculum practices can explicitly help students to heal and learn to disrupt injustice once such issues are explored:

- High-profile police-involved shootings in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Dallas; and Falcon Heights, Minnesota (as well as those in their own communities) where unarmed Black bodies are shot and killed by police
- Colin Kaepernick's refusal to stand during the national anthem and the consequent backlash from the National Football League and fans
- Ongoing national immigration debates over children being taken from their parents and placed in fenced cages
- The Flint, Michigan, water crisis
- The brutal shooting of nine parishioners in a church in Charleston, South Carolina

In other words, if Charlottesville, or any of the above occurrences, is perceived and taught as an isolated incident or not taught at all, we stand to do more harm than good. But when we reimagine the very nature of the curriculum, we have a better chance of changing the world. Helping students embrace their identity, build transferable skills (such as thinking, analyzing, problem solving), and fall in love with learning in order to make the world better for the collective should be our central aims in education. Students' learning and development allow them to examine society and make decisions that benefit the masses—not just a selected few or not just decisions that benefit the individual. In this way, *society offers a real curriculum site* that must be taught if we have a fighting chance at helping all students deal with and counter the effects of racism and other manifestations of hate.

HOW TERMS AND CONSTRUCTS ARE USED

Throughout this book, I use *students of color* to represent non-White students. I do not use the term *minority* because the word carries a historically

negative connotation and because White people and others in the mainstream of society are sometimes in the “minority” in particular places at particular times. Moreover, demographic trends suggest that White people will be the racial minority over the next several decades, particularly in public schools.

I also refer to *culture* and *cultural practices* at times. I attempt to honor the orientations, cultural histories, people’s orientations, preferences, experiences, and practices (their language, their customs, and so forth). However, I try to avoid perpetuating stereotypes that lead people to believe that culture is “inside” of people and static. To the contrary, for instance, just because a person speaks Spanish does not mean that person is of Spanish descent or culture. Moreover, if someone participates in Shabbat, such a practice does not mean that person is part of the Jewish culture or community.

Also, when I use the term *we* throughout this book, I am referring to those in education and society, from parents to teachers to policy makers, who are interested in the educational experiences of all students. In some cases, I use *preservice teachers* to refer to those who are in traditional or nontraditional teacher education programs and may not yet be employed in school systems. When I use the term *in-service teachers*, I am referring to those who are already teaching in schools. I use the terms *teacher* and *educator* interchangeably, as I do *African American* and *Black*. To be clear, I believe the insights, findings, and recommendations in this book that are mostly focused on teachers are transferable to other educators. Thus, at times I use *teacher* and at other times I invoke a broader *educator* label in hopes that teachers as well as other educators build on the lessons in this book. Also, I consistently use *preK–12* to refer to prekindergarten through grade twelve. My point is that teachers across the grade span, teaching all subject matters (including band, art, science, social studies, English arts, chorus, mathematics, and so forth) should take the recommendations of this book seriously. I use the term *urban* to describe a place, not a person or group of people such as students, parents, or teachers.

AUDIENCE FOR THIS BOOK

Although the book has a clear teacher focus, there are important lessons and ideas that are also relevant for other educators, such as principals, school counselors, teachers' assistants, athletic and academic coaches, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. While the narratives given in chapters 2 through 4 are from middle and high school teachers, the six White teachers showcased in chapter 5 demonstrate teacher learning challenges and successes in their teacher education courses that they encountered in grades preK–12. Practicing teachers in urban, rural, and suburban schools as well as students in teacher education programs should read this book, as should teacher educators and researchers interested in students' opportunities to learn.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

In chapter 1, I share what I call an Opportunity Gap Framework to ground and shape the narratives that follow. This framework includes five inter-related areas or tenets: (1) rejection of color blindness; (2) ability and skill to work through cultural conflicts; (3) ability to understand the myth of meritocracy; (4) ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets; and (5) rejection of context-neutral mind-sets and practices.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I showcase narratives from real teachers in US public middle and high schools who capture the nexus of diversity, opportunity, and teaching in their practices. The teachers highlighted are not perfect, and the social contexts in which they work present very challenging realities. They live and function in complex and difficult circumstances. However, they persist despite difficulties as they work to address, embrace, and honor diversity and students' opportunities to learn. Among other important lessons, these chapters demonstrate that teachers from different racial and cultural backgrounds can be (and are) successful teachers of students who are very different from them. Moreover, the cases demonstrate

teachers' astute, persistent, and necessary learning. These teachers build knowledge about their practices and improve. These teachers *start where they are, but they do not stay there!*

Mr. Hall is a White science teacher who learns from moments in his teaching practices and successfully teaches in an urban middle school, Bridge Middle School. Mr. Hall and his students are very different, and Mr. Hall builds knowledge and practices to better meet his students' needs as he listens to what they need from him to succeed. Mr. Jackson, an African American mathematics and science teacher, and Ms. Shaw, an African American social studies teacher, also teach at Bridge Middle School. Although they share the same racial background as their students, their cultural practices and consequently pedagogical practices are very different. Dr. Johnson is an African American language arts teacher who expands her notions of the opportunity-diversity connection by infusing her curriculum and instructional approaches with cultural and gender content in a mostly White, wealthy suburban high school, Stevenson High School. The collective cases in this book show common practices of teacher learning and demonstrate trends that other teachers should consider in their journey to get better and to meet the complex needs of their students, many of whom are very different from them. Thus, the book provides opportunities for readers to examine the teachers in these cases as well as their practices as they critique and adopt curricula, pedagogical, relational, and assessment moves.

In chapter 5, I discuss the learning of six teachers learning to teach in elementary through high schools. As I reflect on my many years of working with teachers in different preservice teacher education programs, I believe their experiences represent the kinds of challenges and successes that those learning to teach tend to face.

After showcasing these teachers and how they come to more deeply understand and work through opportunity gaps, in chapter 6, I shift the discussion to what I call Opportunity-Centered Teaching (OCT). OCT has four interrelated features: (1) OCT is about relationships, (2) OCT is about building community knowledge to inform practice, (3) OCT bridges

students' outside-of-school practices with in-school practices, and (4) it addresses psychological, mental health, and social needs. OCT practices work to disrupt gaps in opportunity.

I conclude the book with some reflections and summations of the main themes and recommendations. In the epilogue I explain my research process so readers can learn in more depth about the journey that led me to share these narratives about the people and social contexts of the schools presented.

Finally, although broad and structural changes can make a powerful impact on students' opportunities, individual teachers can also play a significant role in their classrooms every day! Indeed, teachers *can* make a difference even when they are operating in institutions and systems that do not support their passion and commitment to meeting the complex needs of all students. It is in this vein that I hope educators read this book. Systemic and broad-level change is ideal, but individual-level changes in mind-sets and practices among teachers is a place to begin the journey to construct those moments that become experiences students never forget. Thus, I invite you, the reader, to Start Where You Are—but Don't Stay There!